The Effect of Giving Feedback to Students' Writing

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Abstract: Although writing is as important as other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, it needs more special attention. In order to write well, students need a long process to learn to write and they need continuous feedback. The aim of this article is to know whether giving feedback to students' writing has a significant effect or not. Two groups of students, experimental and control, were involved. The compositions of the first group were given feedback, while those of the second group were not given feedback. The study shows that provision of feedback improves student's wri-ting. In light of the result of the study, it is recommended that teachers provide feedback on students' writing.

Key words: students' writing, language skills, feedback

Writing is an important skill that involves a whole live skill, creative process in finding, resulting and shaping proposition, analysis system, feedback, and revision. Writing in a second language is not simply a matter of how to write new things down in a new code (O'Maggio, 1986), but it is the ability to use the structures, lexical items, and their conventional representation in ordinary matter of fact of writing. In line with O'Maggio, White and Arndt (1991) argue that writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols. Writing is a thinking process in its own right and certainly needs a great intellectual effort which usually takes place a considerable period of time.

According to Ur (1996), writing has three functions: as a means, as an end, and as a means as well as an end. As a means, writing is widely used within foreign language courses as a way for engaging with aspects

of language other than the language itself. For example, learners note down new vocabulary, copy out the grammar rules, and write out to reading or listening comprehension questions. In these examples, writing is simply used either as a means of getting the students to attend to and practice a particular language point. As an end, writing is the main objective of activities. At a micro level, writing can be in the forms of word and sentence or in the forms of hand-writing or typing. At a macro level, the emphasis is on content and organization. In this category, the writing task invites the students to express themselves using their own words, to state a purpose for writing, and to specify on audience by having a narration of the story and writing a letter. It can be said that writing can be the end of the learner in expressing their idea. As both a means and an end, writing combines original writing with the learning or practice of some other skills. Some examples are a written response to the reading of a controversial newspaper article (combination of writing and reading) and the writing of anecdotes to illustrate the meaning of idioms (combination of writing with vocabulary practice).

THE PROCESS OF WRITING

According to White and Arndt (1991), the process of writing consists of several stages which are recursively connected. The stages include generating ideas, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating, and reviewing. Tompkins (1994) divides the process of writing several general steps such as pre-writing, composing, and post-writing.

Pre-writing is the "getting ready to write" stage. The traditional notion stated that writers have thought out their topic completely ridiculous. If writers wait for the ideas to be fully developed, they may wait forever. Instead, writers begin tentatively talking reading and writing to see what they know and what direction they want to go (Tompkins, 1994). Pre-writing is as crucial to writers as a warm-up is to athletes.

Murray (1982) believed that 70% or more of writing time should be spent in pre-writing. During the pre-writing stage, the writer will get through the activities beginning from choosing a topic, meaning that he/she will have the idea in their mind about the material which will be written. Then, based on the purpose of the writing, he/she will have to consider in what form the writing will be and to whom their writing will

be presented to. Generating ideas will be the next activities that are really needed by the writer when organizing the ideas for writing.

In the process of writing, students write and refine their compositions through a series of drafts. During the drafting stage, students focus on getting their ideas down on paper. Writers do not begin writing with their compositions that are already composed in their minds. They begin with tentative ideas developed through pre-writing activities. The drafting stage is the time to pour out the ideas with little concern about spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical errors (Tompkins, 1994). According to Dheram (1995), drafting is concerned with how ideas can be organized and how reading can be led to a conclusion with a sense of a completion. In the process of drafting, the writer tries to write without worrying about mechanical or spelling errors.

During the revising stage, which is also the post-writing stage, a writer refines ideas in his/her compositions. Students often terminate the writing process as soon as they complete a rough draft, believing that once their ideas are jotted down the writing task is complete. The word revision means seeing again and on this stage, the writer sees his/her composition again with the assistance of the teacher or a competent person. The revising stage may include several activities. The first is re-reading the rough draft that is made by the students that usually made in the form of note. The second is sharing the rough draft to the writing groups or with the teacher in order to have an opinion about what have the students write. Finally, Revising may be based on feedback received from the audience or the teacher. The writers rewrite the compositions of their writing based on the notes and feedback that have been given.

In addition to revising, editing, that is putting the piece of writing into the final form, can be conducted. Until this stage, the focus has been primarily on the contents of the students writing (Tompkins, 1994). Once the focus changes to mechanics, students make their writing flow smoothly by having corrections on spelling and other mechanical errors. The main aim in editing is to make the students' writing can be optimally readable by the reader.

THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK

In the context of teaching in general, feedback is information that is

given to the learner following the learning process about his or her task, usually with the objective to improve performance. Something that has to be considered is the follow-up of the learning process after getting feedback from the teacher. Some examples in the language teaching, the statement "yes, right" that is said to the learners who have answered a question or in a written message in a student's work 70% is done by most teacher, or even comments written in the margin of an essay (Ur, 1996).

In the teaching and learning process in the classroom, should learner 'errors be corrected? When should they be corrected? Which errors should be corrected? How should errors be corrected? Who should do the correcting? Some of these questions have received more attention than others. Research studies have been conducted in intensive ESL classes in Quebec (Spada & Lightbown, 1993; White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991). They examined the effect of a combination of proactive and reactive approaches to focus-on-form, that is, both forms-focused instructional materials and feedback on error.

It is already known that second language learners who succeed in communicating a message and who receive no negative or corrective feedback will often assume that their interlingual hypotheses will not attempt to change or improve (O'Maggio, 1986). Feedback is needed so as to minimize the second language learners' errors and to give the solution on to the student's writing.

Feedback has two main distinguishable components: assessment and correction (Ur, 1996). In assessment, the learner is simply informed how well or badly he or she has performed. A percentage grade on an exam would be one example, or the response "no" to an answer to a question in class, or a comment such as "fair" at the end of a written assignment. In correction, some specific information is provided on aspects of the learner's performance, through explanation or provision of better, or other alternatives, or through elicititation.

According to Lyster and Ranta (1999), there are several types of feedback. *Explicit correction* refers to the explicit provision of the correct form of learner's utterance. As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicated that what the students had said was incorrect. *Recasts* involve the teacher's reformulation of all part of a student's utterance, minus the error. *Clarification requests* suggest that the student's utterance is

misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way and that the repetition or a reformulation is required. Metalinguistic feedback is given either in the forms of comments, information, or questions related to the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form. It tends to indicate that there are some errors some where.

According to Ur (1996), feedback implies power hierarchy. For example, providing feedback is the teacher's personal role in the classroom. The teacher has the right to correct and asses. In giving feedback, teacher should give positive feedback as it tends to encourage the students in having the next of his or her work in the line of the note that has been given by the teacher. Giving praise is a way to express the feedback from teacher which fosters good teacher-student relationship. It is important that for teachers to develop awareness, not only of the ways in which we provide feedback to learners, but also that teachers monitor who gets the feedback or in other word, to whom feedback is addressed (Nunan, 2000).

In teaching learning process, it is difficult not to provide correction feedback in the classroom. In addition, as a matter of fact, there is compelling evidence that learners expect feedback. As stated by Nunan (2000) in a major investigation of the learning preferences adult ESL learners, error correction by the teacher was one of the most highly valued and desired classroom's activities.

In addition to the findings above, the studies in investigating the effects of feedback are commonly oriented to overall feedback for the learner's writing. Dheram (1995) investigated how learners responded to feedback both on language use and content. It was evident from the revised versions that learners used feedback as reference for addition, deletion, and rearrangement for their ideas. Research conducted by Cahyono (1996) showed a similar finding. That multiple drafts that students produced for the joined assignment were submitted to the lecturer for feedback. Evaluation at the first draft stage was based on a descriptive marking scale addressing issues of context and rhetorical development. Analysis of drafts after feedback indicated that students tried to make links between propositions. It is shown that feedback is crucial in getting students to be more explicit and in making learners express propositions in their writing more rigorously.

The aim of the study was to know whether giving feedback could give significant effects on the students' writing and to know whether the feedback that was given by the teacher was effective or not.

METHOD

This study used a pre-test post-test design, involving two groups. The first group received feedback on their writing, while the second group received no feedback in their writing. These groups were given a pre test to know their starting point of the students' writing ability and a post test to measure, if any, significant effects of feedback and revision on students' writing.

This study involved two classes of students of the English Department of Islamic University of Indonesia-Sudan, Malang. When the study was conducted, the students attended Writing I course. The data of the research was obtained through the students' writing in the two classes. The result of the students' writing was collected in one semester. However, this study focused on the writing of the third-year students attending Writing I classes.

Writing tests were used as research instruments. This study was conducted in three steps: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test aimed to know the starting point of the student's grade on writing a paragraph. In the pre-test, students were asked to write a paragraph of the certain topics based on the course outline used in the semester. For this purpose, 6 topics were given for each student to make a paragraph. The number of the sentences was not considered but the students had to write a paragraph based on the given topics even though they did not receive any materials yet. Based on the provided materials, judgment was made whether students had excellent, good, fair, and poor criteria. The assignments analyzed were only those in the forms of a paragraph. The process of making topic sentence, subtopics, and the assignment before the students made a paragraph was not analyzed.

Following the collection of data from the post-test, the criteria of the judgment for the students' assessments was determined based on the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, et al., 1981). The purpose of using the standard of the student's ability using this Profile was to know the students' grades before and after having Writing I course.

Table 1. The criteria of judgment in the pre-test and post-test

The Score of the test	Meaning
100-92	High Advanced
91-83	Advanced
82-74	Low advanced
73-65	High Intermediate
64-56	Intermediate
55-47	Low Intermediate
46-38	High Beginning
37- below	Beginning

With the criteria, the researcher collected and recorded the data from the field for each assignment for the two groups. The data were in the forms of grades for each assignment for the whole semester. Scoring in each assignment was done by focusing on five criteria. They were content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic of the paragraph.

The treatment was conducted following the pre-test and given only to the experimental group for the whole semester. The treatment was in the forms of notes or feedback written in the end of the students' writing, requiring them to revise their writing. Feedback was provided by the researchers to the students' weekly assignments. After having feedback, the students had to revise their writing again. From the result of the revision, a conclusion was drawn.

A post-test was given after the students finished their revisions based on their mistakes. The post-test was given in the form of making a new paragraph and a new feature of writing. A final judgment on the existence of a significant result of giving feedback on their Writing I course was made by comparing the results of pre-test and post-test.

To score the students' writing performance, the ESL Composition Profile was used. The profile was used because it enabled the researcher not only to judge, but also to apply the scoring criteria. The scoring aimed to know whether feedback affected the students or not. According to the ESL Composition Profile, the maximum score for content is 30, for organization is 20, for vocabulary is 20, for language use is 25, and for mechanics is 5, totaling 100.

In order to know whether the instruments were reliable, they were

assessed prior to the real testing. The try-out conducted with the help of the classroom teacher showed that the prompt was understandable and well-read by the students. A reliability coefficient of .99 was gained for the instruments at the coefficient alpha .05. In the research analysis, data of post-tests of the students were compared using t-test, involving experimental and control groups. The result was used as a clue to answer the research question whether giving feedback can have significant effect on the student's writing or not.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data acquired in the post-test were in the form of scores, just like the data that had been acquired in the pre-test. The process in analyzing the data from both groups began by finding out the mean of each assignment: pre-test, post-test, and revision, and sum it into a total score. The main aim of this experimental study was to determine whether there was a significance difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The score means were acquired from all the assignments. The mean of the pre-test for experimental group was 68.15. The mean of pos-test for the control group was 71.40 and for the experimental group was 78.62.

Pre-test and post-test data for each group were then compared. This analysis was aimed to know the effect from feedback that was given. To have a final judgment in data nalysis, the researcher used t-test to compare between the experimental and control groups. A comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experiental group resulted in t-value of -16.03. With the t-table of 1.73, the t-value is significant at a coefficient alpha 5% with a degree of freedom of 19 (see Table 2). The result of comparison indicated that there was a significant effect of giving feedback to students' writing.

Table 2. Comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group

Variables	Obtained t	df	t-table	Conclusion
Pre-test and post-test	-16.03	19	1.73	Significant

Another comparison was conducted between post-test score means of the experimental and control groups. The comparison resulted in the t-value of 0.97. With the t-table of 5.26, the t-value was significant at a coefficient alpha 5% with a degree of freedom of 19 (see Table 3). This meant that there was a significant different between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. In other words, feedback affected the difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.

Table 3. Comparison between post-test scores of the experimental and control groups

Variables	Obtained t	df	t-table	Conclusion
Post-test scores of the experimental and control groups	0.97	19	5.26	Significant

The results of comparisons showed that the calculated t value for the compared pre-test and post-test was significant for the experimental group. This meant that there was a significant progress from the result of pre-test and post-test for the experimental group. Whereas, the resulted t value of -14.14 for the control group indicated that there was no significant progress between the pre-test and post-test scores for the control group.

Final remarks would be interesting to mention concerning data collection. The available grouping of students made it easier for the researcher to conduct the research considering that the sample was cluster sampling technique. The support of the classroom teacher also had a significant role in conducting the research. However, in collecting data, the researcher could not feel satisfied as it was difficult to acquire the data maximally. The intensity of the students in attending courses made it hard for them to submit revisions on time. In addition, some of the students could not attend writing sessions for several reasons such as sickness, having personal matters, and other activities outside the class.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that feedback improved students' writing. However, this study had some limitations. For example, the researcher could not detect factors that might influence the result, such as outside-classroom activities that support students' writing skill. An important thing to note is that the research was facilitated by the classroom teachers so that it could run naturally. In other words, the students did not feel that they were involved in research. It is hoped that lecturers can provide guidance based on research to help the students in improving writing skills. It is also expected that this study could be a basis for further researchers to involve deeply on studying students writing ability in general and more particularly on giving feedback on their writing.

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